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ABSTRACT

In Latin America and the industrialized nations of North America and Europe, the traditionally small impact of women on politics is gradually changing. Five avenues for women to achieve positions of leadership and political impact are: (1) government positions, (2) political parties, (3) women's organizations, (4) other organizations, and (5) the business sector. A study examined women's leadership in political parties, women's organizations, and other organizations in two traditional Latin American societies, Ecuador and Colombia. It draws heavily on surveys conducted previously by the author in Ecuador and Colombia. During the 1993-94 academic year, in-person interviews with a national urban sample of Ecuadorian women (n=120) involved in politics and similar samples of women (n=70) in business and the professions and of male (n=70) political leaders. During 1984-85, a sample of Colombian women (n=121) political leaders was questioned, followed by a sample of male political leaders (n=82) in 1987. Survey results suggest that while group action by women is possible, there are serious obstacles reducing the likelihood of success. For example, respondents felt that many women were indifferent to women's political success. In much of Latin America, women's (particularly feminist) organizations are frequently denigrated by both male and female leaders. Findings suggest that opportunities for women to lead are slowly increasing but are still at a low level. The anomaly is that women are far more likely to hold major decision-making roles in Colombia than in Ecuador, but women leaders in Ecuador show more concern for the problems of other women. (Contains 25 references and 8 tables.) (BT)

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WOMEN, POLITICS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ECUADOR AND COLOMBIA

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Women, Politics, and Organizational Leadership in Ecuador and Colombia

In both Latin America and the industrialized nations of North America and Europe, the traditionally small impact of women on politics is gradually changing. In a few advanced industrial societies, such as Scandinavia, women, while still a minority, have made considerable progress toward parity in political leadership and influence. In most, however, women are substantially under represented in top decision making positions, and women's issues are seldom a high priority. In more traditional, developing societies, the barriers are even more formidable and progress notably slower. Five avenues for women to achieve positions of leadership and political impact are government positions, political parties, women's organizations, other organizations, and the business sector. In other works, the author has examined women's participation in government leadership positions in Ecuador and Colombia (Biles, 1997, 1988). The present study examines women's leadership in political parties, women's organizations, and other organizations in two highly traditional Latin American societies, Ecuador and Colombia.

METHODS

The paper draws heavily on surveys conducted by the author in the northern South American countries of Colombia and Ecuador. During the 1993-94 academic year, the author conducted in-person interviews with a national urban sample of 120 Ecuadorian women involved in politics (broadly defined) and similar samples of 70 women in business and the professions and of 70 male political leaders. Additional information was gathered during short research trips in 1997 and 2000. During 1984-85, a sample of 121 Colombian women political leaders was interviewed, followed by a sample of 82 male political leaders in 1987. Findings from research by others have updated the Colombian surveys. The sampling method was a modified snowball technique. Sampling was carried out where the sex of incumbents was known (e.g., in elective positions). Respondents provided names of additional potential respondents. Interviews were selected to provide geographic, functional/positional, and party representation based on the limited knowledge of the distribution of leaders by sex. The interviews were based on an instrument with both open and closed ended questions. Interviews with women in politics required 30 minutes to 1½ hours (mode of

45 minutes), while interviews for the other two samples (using shortened versions of the same questionnaire) required 20-40 minutes (mode of 30 minutes). The questionnaire draws on questions and hypotheses from studies in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, including Elsa Chaney's pathbreaking study of Chile and Peru, *Supermadre: Women in Politics in Latin America* (1979). To determine the proportions of women in various positions, name analysis was performed on directories and archival material. Limited amounts of already compiled data were also found in secondary sources.

BACKGROUND

The socioeconomic transformation of Latin America in the last fifty years has been dramatic, although highly irregular, and as a consequence, the change in gender roles has been substantial, although also highly irregular (Safa 1992, 69; Inter-American Development Bank 1995, 1-16). Economies and cities have grown, while women have experienced "lower fertility, smaller household size, and increased educational levels and labor force participation," along with poverty and inequality (ibid, 70). Ecuador and Colombia have experienced these changes and

currently stand in the middle range of development among Latin American nations—with Colombia slightly more developed on most indicators. These indicators include per capita GDP, manufacturing as a percentage of GDP, urbanization, life expectancy, literacy, and population with safe drinking water. At the same time, both countries are among the more traditional Latin American countries. This is particularly true of Ecuador. In the words of John D. Martz, "The country has been deeply penetrated by Spanish values of authoritarianism and personalism. [It is] long accustomed to strong paternalistic leadership..." (1996, 327-28). Traditional social values and practices remain quite strong in both countries; the Catholic Church, for example, has far more influence than in most of Latin America, although it now speaks in several voices, many progressive.

One consequence of the colonial heritage is the strong effect it has on the position of women today. For the situation of Ecuadorian women, Spanish colonialism was a determining factor. Under it, the Spanish would take good care of their wives and daughters, while indigenous and black women would have to work for the benefit of others...Once the Republic was founded, women could in part leave this dark and secondary role to achieve some

modernization, at least in a few legal aspects as a consequence of the Liberal Revolution at the turn of this century. Nevertheless, the roles and status...[of mother, wife, and daughter] appear as remnants of this historical heritage (Luzuriaga, n.d., 18-19).

Although Ecuadorian women fought in the war of independence, they were barred from open political participation in the new republic, and it was socially inappropriate for women to speak of politics (Jiménez de Vega 1990, 77). The Constitution of 1830 barred women from voting by implication, while the Constitution of 1883 limited citizenship explicitly to males. This was reversed by the Liberal Constitution of 1897, which eliminated the word "male." The Liberal Revolution also enabled women to hold public office, and a number of women soon entered the administration of the postal service. Universities were also opened to women and normal schools established. Normal schools became a major source of education for women and their professors an important part of political life (Romo-Leroux 1983, 12-16). In 1924 a woman doctor, Matilde Hidalgo de Prócel, asked to be registered as a voter and was accepted (although the decision eventually went to the Council of State). The following year, she became the first woman to vote. Also in 1925, the educator

Amarilis Fuentes Alcívar became the first woman to serve as a principal municipal council member. In the 1929 Constitution, the Congress recognized the range of political rights for women, provisions that have been continued and extended in subsequent constitutions. Thus, Ecuador became the first South American nation to extend the suffrage to women. Until 1967, however, the vote was obligatory for men but optional for women; in that year, it was made mandatory for both. Prior to 1967, women never made up more than 20% of the voters (Luzuriaga, n.d., 127). The modern constitutions of 1978 and 1996 provide explicitly for the legal and political equality of the two sexes and the right for all citizens to vote and be elected. In practice today, there are few legal impediments to political participation by Ecuadorian women, but they are significantly limited in other areas by laws grounded in the earlier periods and by the lack of enforcement of laws requiring equality of treatment.

In Colombia as well, women have traditionally been subordinated to men. In fact, with the exception of a brief period in the nineteenth century, the right to participate directly in government decisions came late in Colombia compared to the pattern in other Latin American countries. Women received the

right to hold administrative posts in 1936, citizenship in 1946, and the right to vote and be elected in 1954. They exercised the vote for the first time in 1957—placing them among the last women in Latin America to do so. Among both women and men, mass political participation is moderate by Latin American standards, and women tend to lower participation than men in voting, campaign work, organizational membership, political communication, and over-all level of participation. Nevertheless, Colombian women, especially those in cities, do not fit the traditional apolitical pattern often assumed to be found in Latin America. In the areas of formal and socially supported participation (such as voting), under the stimulus of a presidential campaign, or in the case of less political, more particularistic action, mass female-male differences are often small or nonexistent (Biles 1980 1983, 1985, 1994).

At the elite or activist level, on the other hand, there are substantial differences in the participation rates of women and men in Colombia, as well as in neighboring Ecuador and Venezuela. In Colombia, women are substantially under represented in political and governmental positions; however, the situation varies by area. The proportions of women in the judicial and executive branches

generally match or exceed those for women in the developed Western nations outside of Scandinavia. It is in legislative and party positions where women leaders are particularly scarce. Women are making substantial progress in Venezuela and much slower progress toward leadership positions in Ecuador (Biles 1988; 1994, 166-71; 1997).

In Colombia, women began to enter the nation's universities in significant numbers in the 1950s. A university degree is an important ticket to leadership in public and private life in Colombia, and as the number of women with degrees has increased, the number of women in influential positions has increased. A similar pattern emerged in Ecuador, but at a later date. Between 1970 and 1987, Ecuadorian women increased their proportion among the nation's university students from 28% to 47% (Mardesic 1992, 248), with a consequent movement into the entry levels of business and political leadership. While few of these have yet reached the highest levels, they are making inroads. According to Ecuador's 1982 and 1990 censuses, women in directive and "superior" public and private positions increased from 15.5% to 26.0% (Mardesic 1992, 169-70). Among both female and male respondents in the author's Ecuadorian survey,

the overwhelming majority (three-fourths of women politicians) were university graduates, with over a fifth having postgraduate training. As is true in the general population, male politicians were slightly more likely to have a university education.

ANALYSIS

In Latin America, the number and political influence of organizations have increased significantly in recent decades. For Latin American women, as well as men, participation in organizations provides opportunities for personal advancement and policy impact. In this section, women's roles in three types of organizations are examined: political parties, women's organizations, and other organizations (particularly voluntary organizations and NGOs). As will be seen, they provide women with significantly different levels of opportunity.

Political Parties. The role of political parties varies considerably from one country to another in Latin America. However, in Colombia and Ecuador, they are independent institutions that play a central role in the choice of government leaders and the development of the political and governmental agenda. The parties, for example, are the sources of the lists of

candidates from which voters choose. Thus, leadership positions within the parties are sources of power and influence. Unfortunately, in both countries, women have found it very difficult to advance to senior party positions. Two parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, have dominated Colombian politics for a century and a half. Since 1963, the Liberal Party's rules have required representation of women in the regional and municipal directorates: at least one woman for each five directors and two women in six-person directorates. Women tend to make up almost 50% of the party's national convention delegates but have generally had only token representation in the national directorate. In 1991, under pressure from women members of congress, the party increased the national directorate to seven and included two women. In 1993, there were three seats on the directorate, one filled by a woman. In the same year, the Conservative party had no women in the national directorate. The leftist, former revolutionary party, Democratic Alliance M-19, had one woman among its five directors in 1993 (Valdés and Gomáriz, 1993, 101).

Women have also had difficulty in obtaining leadership positions in Ecuador's political parties (Brito M. 1997, 106-9). The most commonly held nominally high position has been the head of

the women's section of the party, a position that does not ordinarily lead to membership in the directorate of the party. There has, however, been some movement toward more women leaders in the period since 1978 when the current democratic era began. As Table 1 shows, in 1978, there were no women among the 13 national party presidents, and only 4% of the other 266 national party officials were women. By 1994, two of the 14 party presidents were women, and 10% of the 522 other party officials were women. There was, then, improvement, but women were still largely outside the base of party power.

Women's Organizations. A strategy long used by women in a variety of countries for overcoming the consequences of discrimination and subordination is organization and group solidarity (Craske 1999, 112-38; 162-91). The women's movement was instrumental in achieving women's suffrage in many countries and more recently has struggled for equal rights and non-discrimination. In Latin America, women's organizations with feminist goals have experienced increasing success but face a number of problems (Jaquette 1994; Alvarez 1990; Jaquette and Wolchik 1998, 13). In addition to the continuing power of beliefs in traditional roles and behavior for women, feminism and the

women's movement are often thought to be imports from North America with little to offer Latin American women. On the other hand, a tremendous boon to the women's movement has been the growth in number and importance of voluntary and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They have given women increasing opportunities to exercise leadership roles denied or minimized in more traditional political settings, such as the parties, and have provided fora to focus on issues long neglected by male-dominated institutions.

In Colombia and Ecuador, the development of a significant organizational base for women dates particularly from the 1980s, during which the number of women's and feminist organizations grew substantially (Arboleda 1992, 343). The growth in Ecuador of NGOs with action aimed at women is shown in Table 2. The development of the women's movement in both countries has shown patterns similar to that of the rest of Latin America, although Ecuador appears to have lagged behind much of the region (Jaquette 1994, 2-6).

The results of the author's surveys suggest that while group action by women is possible, there are serious obstacles reducing the likelihood of success. In both countries, a number of

respondents volunteered complaints about the lack of solidarity among women. A more systematic indication came when respondents were asked about the attitudes of five categories of significant others toward their political or group participation. In Ecuador, almost as many women saw "other women" as indifferent as felt they supported them. In Colombia 67% of women said that "other women" supported them, but this was the lowest proportion among the five groups (Table 3). Moreover, there was almost always a long pause before responding to this question, whereas the other four groups were generally classified quickly. In both countries, several women volunteered the comment that the gap in understanding between women who were substantially tied to the home and those with a profession outside it was great. Several Colombian women and one man with feminist views commented that Colombian women were socialized to cooperate with men but to compete with other women.

In much of Latin America, women's (and particularly feminist) organizations are frequently denigrated by both male and female leaders (Craske 1999, 162). This was true in the surveys in Colombia. When respondents were asked the goals of feminist movements, a significant proportion of both sexes said that the

feminist movement did not exist in Colombia or that they were unfamiliar with it. Of those who did have an opinion, a common tendency was to distinguish between those groups that were anti-male or personally motivated and those that fought for the rights and opportunities of women. In fact, feminist organizations were quite small in Colombia in the 1980s and only slightly more common today. Moreover, feminism as both concept and movement was seen by many as a part of North American cultural imperialism and of questionable applicability to Colombia. Not surprisingly, then, a majority of both sexes disapproved of the goals of the movements (Table 4).

In Ecuador, on the other hand, perceptions of the women's movement were more positive. When asked to describe the goals of feminist organizations, 58% of Ecuadorian female political leaders provided positive descriptions, and only 10% negative descriptions. Similarly, when asked, "For you personally, are the objectives of the feminist movement correct or incorrect?" 50% thought they were proper, while 33% gave a mixed response and 17% a negative judgment (Table 4).

It would appear that for the feminist movement to have more success in Colombia, it will need to deal with the perception

of being anti-male and emphasize consciousness raising among women. It is apparent from the responses to open ended questions about the feminist movement that many of the goals and values of feminism have wide support among Colombian women and that it may be the negative connotations of the label, rather than its content, that lead to the substantial rejection of feminist movements in the country.

In Ecuador and Colombia, women's organizations are relatively small in number and weak politically. They have had some success in raising consciousness and influencing legislation on a few issues such as reform of Ecuador's civil code (Table 5). In both countries, they are viewed as only moderately successful. Respondents were asked, "Do you believe that these [women's] movements have had success in Ecuador [Colombia]? Would you say a great deal, some, or none?" Eighty-eight percent of the Ecuadorian women said "some," compared to 50% of the Colombian women. Importantly, over a third of the Colombian women leaders said the women's movement had experienced no success (Table 6).

In spite of the widespread lukewarm evaluation of the women's movement in the two countries, the study does suggest

that women's organizations may serve an important role in recruitment and training of political leaders. Almost three out of four Ecuadorian women political leaders belonged to a "women's association or movement" (74%), and the same proportion reported that they had worked "frequently" with others to resolve a problem particularly affecting women. When asked the organization in which they were currently most active, 43% named a woman's group. Thus, significant proportions of Ecuadorian women leaders are working with and for other women. There is also a significant, though smaller, cadre of Colombian women working on behalf of other women. Forty-five percent of the Colombian leaders reported working frequently with others to resolve some problem that particularly affects women; however, over a third had never done so (Table 7). Similarly, 54% belonged to a women's association or movement; however, only 18% named a women's group as the organization in which they were most active.

Other Organizations. In both Colombia and Ecuador, women with any degree of feminist consciousness commonly noted that women had greater opportunities for leadership roles and for advancement of women's issues in organizations outside of government and the parties. One indicator of the importance of

voluntary associations and NGOs in Ecuador today is the degree to which they are an integral part of the career pattern of the nation's women political leaders. For many, they also serve as a springboard to more traditional political participation. Sixty percent of women political leaders had worked (paid or voluntary) in at least one organization during their career; 52% had worked in an organization and in government or a political party. A minority of the leaders (37%) had worked in government or a party but not in an organization, and only 7% had worked in an organization but not in government or a party. The range of type of organizations was wide, but the most common focused on the needs of women (34%; see Table 8).

In Colombia, there is a pattern across various types of organizations for women to play a substantial leadership role at the local, particularly neighborhood or community level, to play a small but increasing role at intermediate levels, but to have few leaders at the highest levels. By the early 1990s, women had increased their seats in the elected directorates of such neighborhood organizations as Local Administrative Juntas, Leagues of Users, and Juntas of Communal Action to around 50% (Alameda, 1993, 33). In keeping with traditional patterns, women

were particularly likely to be the secretary and less likely to serve as president. Among peasant and indigenous women, there is also a strong pattern of local leadership, particularly at the informal level, including leadership of such activist steps as land invasions, civic strikes (*paros cívicos*), and community construction of housing and health clinics (Valdés and Gomáriz, 1993, 105). These local successes are not duplicated at higher levels. Neither urban nor rural women have been able to gain election in substantial numbers to municipal, state, or national levels of the organizations they lead at the local level. Numbers are particularly low at the state and national levels.

Cooperatives have been an important part of the Colombian economy since the 1930s. However, only in the 1970s did women begin to join in significant numbers. By 1987, one survey indicated that they had become 42% of the membership. Nevertheless, in 1989 and 90 they constituted only 12.4% and 14.7% respectively of the leadership of cooperatives (ibid, 104). As women have moved increasingly into the paid workforce, their membership in unions has increased. By 1991, they were 25.5% of union membership in the four largest states. With women making up 40% of union membership in the public sector, compared to 20%

in the private sector, it is not surprising that they have found more leadership possibilities in public sector unions. Women have played major leadership roles in the Colombian Federation of Educators and the National Federation of Workers at the Service of the State. Of the latter's 58 member unions, eight were headed by women in the early 1990s, and the national federation has been headed by a woman. Unfortunately, the restructuring of the union confederations in the late 1980s and early 1990s sharply reduced the already small number of women leaders at the top levels of the nation's unions (ibid, 102-103).

CONCLUSION

Opportunities for women to lead are slowly increasing but are still at a low level. Opportunities in government, particularly in the executive, are increasing, but the growth in the number of women in decision making roles within the political parties is increasing only slowly. The women's movement is still weak in Colombia and Ecuador. The situation of women in these two traditional societies places serious constraints on the success of the women's movement. Particularly in Colombia, feminism and the women's movement suffer from negative images, and the more

recent generation of women in Colombian public life tends to see less need or legitimacy for women's organizations. In both societies, women leaders tend to feel a lack of solidarity among women. On the other hand, there are several factors favoring the growth of both the size and impact of women's organizations. In both countries, the women's movement is relatively young, dating largely from the 1980s (with some stirrings in the 1970s in the case of Colombia). Thus, it has time to grow and gain acceptance. It is seen as moderately successful by women leaders in both countries, although more so in Ecuador. Opportunities for women to occupy leadership roles and to direct organized activity to resolve women's problems have increased markedly as a consequence of the growth of NGOs in both countries. There is a substantial number of women working in women's organizations and on women's problems in both countries but particularly so in Ecuador. The growth in the number of women in the more traditional organizations, such as unions and cooperatives, has been slower than in the case of the newer NGOs and voluntary associations. Finally, the paper raises but does not explain the anomaly that women are far more likely to hold major decision-making roles in

Colombia than in Ecuador but that women leaders in Ecuador show more concern for the problems of other women.

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Table 1. National Party Leadership Positions by Sex in Ecuador, 1978-1994[a]

	1978		1984-86		1990		1992-94	
	President	Others	Pres.	Others	Pres.	Others	Pres.	Others
	M-F	M-F	M-F	M-F	M-F	M-F	M-F	M-F
Number	13-0	255-11	15-1	526-41	12-1	472-47	12-2	472-50
Percent Women	0	4	6	7	8	9	14	10

a. Source: Tribunal Supremo Electoral of Ecuador, Archives.

Table 2. Period of Creation of NGOs with Programs Aimed at Women in Ecuador[a]

	To 1959	1960-69	1970-79	1980-84	1985-90	No Date	Total
Number	1	5	10	17	15	38	86

[a]Source: Valdés and Gomáriz 1992, 112.

TABLE 3. Perception of Attitudes Held by Other People about their Participation in Politics or Organization among Women Political Leaders by Group in Ecuador and Colombia (%)

ECUADOR

ATTITUDE OF:	Family	Women Friends	Husband, Companion	Other Women	Men
Support	69%	78%	82%	43%	44%
Indifferent/mixed	23	20	7	39	49
Opposed	8	2	11	17	7
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%

COLOMBIA

Support	87%	83%	76%	67%	73%
Indifferent/mixed	9	13	12	23	12
Opposed	5	4	12	10	15
TOTAL	101%	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 4. Evaluations of the Goals of the Feminist Movement by Women Political Leaders in Ecuador and Colombia (%)

	ECUADOR			COLUMBIA	
DESCRIPTION OF GOALS[a]		OBJECTIVES ARE:[b]		OBJECTIVES ARE:[b]	
Positive	58%	Correct	50%	Correct	42%
Mixed (pos. & neg.)	31	(Mixed)	33		
Negative	10	Incorrect	17	Incorrect	58
TOTAL	99%		100%		100%

a. Question: In recent years, there is talk about feminist movements. To your way of thinking, what are the goals of these movements?" Responses were evaluated as positive, negative, or mixed.

b. Question: "For you personally, the objectives of the feminist movement are correct or incorrect?"

TABLE 5. Areas of Success of Feminist Movements in Ecuador According to Women Political Leaders (first response in %)

Improve situation of women[a]	40%
Change laws	27
Improvements at the popular (working class) level	13
Increase public awareness	13
Increase women's awareness	7
TOTAL	100%

a. Employment, economic, violence against women, achieving political offices, education, more participation, more influence, and improved welfare.

TABLE 6. Evaluation of the Success of Feminist Movements in Their Country by Women Political Leaders in Ecuador and Colombia (%)

DEGREE OF SUCCESS	ECUADOR	COLOMBIA
Great (Mucho)	9%	13%
Some (Poco)	89	50
None (Ninguno)	2	37
TOTAL	100%	100%

TABLE 7. Frequency of Work with Others on Problems Particularly Affecting Women by Women Political Leaders in Ecuador and Colombia (%)[a]

	ECUADOR	COLOMBIA
Frequently	74%	45%
Once or twice	19	18
Never	7	37
TOTAL	100%	100%

a "Have you worked sometime with other people to resolve some problem that particularly affects women? Have you done it: Frequently, Once or twice, or Never?"

TABLE 8. Types of Organizations in which Women Political Leaders in Ecuador Have Worked (%)[a]

NGOs and Voluntary Organizations	
Women's	34%
Development	10
Working Class (*Popular*)	10
Professional & Chamber of Commerce	8
Indigenous	4
Educational	4
Volunteer	2
Human Rights	2
Union	22
Student Organization	10
Other	14

[a] Percentage of women who have worked (paid or voluntary) in organizations. Includes multiple answers; thus, does not add to 100%.

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